



## MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

**Meeting Date:** August 13, 2020

**Agenda Item:** Lone Tree Conservation Easement, Region 6

**Action Needed:** Final Approval      **Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

**Background:** FWP proposes to purchase the Lone Tree Conservation Easement (CE) on approximately 11,285 acres in Blaine County. The appraised value of the CE is \$5,093,680, which would be primarily funded using Habitat Montana, Montana Sheep Auction Fund, and a grant from the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust. The CE would comprise shrub and prairie grasslands, as well as forested breaks associated with the Missouri River. The property contains year-long habitat for bighorn sheep, mule deer, antelope, elk, sage-grouse, upland birds, and a diversity of non-game wildlife species. The CE would enhance existing native and non-native habitats through implementation of a grazing system and reseedling of cultivated land to permanent vegetative cover. The CE also would ensure that free public hunting and recreational opportunities would be available while maintaining the traditional agricultural use and private ownership of the property.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** An initial 30-day public review was conducted in October 2019. Comments were incorporated into the draft environmental assessment (EA), which was made available for a 30-day public comment period (June-July 2020). Legal Notice of the EA release and comment period was published in the Havre Daily News and the Helena Independent Record. Public Notice was placed on the FWP website and the information was shared via the FWP Region 6 Facebook page. Direct mailing and/or email notification was provided to adjacent landowners, interested parties, Blaine County Commissioners, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Montana Department of Natural Resources (DNRC), area legislators, and other interested parties. A public meeting was advertised and held at the MSU-Northern Hensler Auditorium on June 30, 2020; there were 13 members of the public in attendance. The draft EA, the easement and the management plan were available to interested parties by downloading them from the FWP website. Hard copies were available at the FWP Region 6 offices in Glasgow and Havre and at the public meeting in Havre. A total of 22 comments were received through the public comment period. Nineteen comments were in support of the CE. Three comments raised concerns or questions about the CE, with two of those comments opposing the CE. The Decision Notice addressed these concerns and recommended proceeding with the project.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** No action is the only viable alternative and would mean that a conservation easement would not be purchased on this private property. The management plan developed cooperatively by FWP and the landowner, as well as the accompanying grazing infrastructure improvements and reseedling, would not be implemented on the land, and the guarantee of perpetual public hunting and wildlife viewing access would be lost.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** FWP recommends that this purchase be completed. The project is largely supported in the area and by sports persons and groups. Public concerns raised through the EA process could be mitigated or minimized without conflicting with the purpose or terms of the proposed CE.

**Proposed Motion:**

I move the commission approve FWP's purchase of the Lone Tree Conservation Easement as presented.